



Assamese Folk Culture and Oral Literature: A Study

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Abstract: *The northeastern region of India is comprised of eight states: Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura, and Sikkim. The foremost region is different cultures and oral literature, by which it may be said that the region is unique in its diversification in the society. The socio-economic, socio-cultural, political, and historical evolutions, as well as ethnic and linguistic diversity, gradually change the environment of the region. On the other hand, the region is very popular for its folk culture and oral literature from the past. In this paper an attempt has been made to find out the root cause of continuation folk culture and oral literature among different communities in the region, especially in Assam. The main objective of the paper is to analyze the different folk culture and literature in Assam. The paper is descriptive in nature, and data have been collected from different secondary sources. At last, a finding is also concluded.*

Key Words: *folk, culture, oral, tradition, identity, development.*

1. INTRODUCTION: ‘Culture’ word derives from the Latin word "cultus", meaning ‘care’. Scholars differ in opinions regarding the proper definition of culture. Etymologically, the word Folk means 'of or about the inhabitants of the land, their culture, tradition or history', or to go to its Assamese synonyms, it would mean people or Lok. Therefore, the connotation of the term folk culture refers to the culture of the people of an area in general and it includes mental, social, and physical means of the people, which make life, run its course. Folk culture is as old as human civilization and the collection of folk literature and folk culture dates back to the 5th - 6th century B.C. However, scientific discussion on folk culture began only in the 16th century A.D. The forerunners of the study of folk culture in Assam and the rest of India were the Civil Servants of the British Government and the Christian missionaries. However, even before them, in the creations of medieval poets and writers of Assam, there are a large number of sources of folk culture. In the writings of Sankaradev, Madhabdev, Madhab Kandali, Harihar Bipra, and Ananta Kandali, we find the sources of the folk culture of Assam but these sources or the works lack scientific explanations. Therefore, it can be said that the scientific study of folklore and folk culture began during the colonial rule. Technically and gradually, the study of folk culture includes its various dimensions such as Oral literature, the material culture of the society, social folk customs, folk performing art, etc. Assam is a land of numerous tribes and has often been regarded as the melting pot of multi-cultural ethnic society from the very past. It is said that Assam is a miniature replica of the subcontinent. Its geography has the characteristics that enabled many of the trans-regional elements to adapt themselves to the ecological condition of Assam. The history of Assam is one of the continuous reflections of large-scale population movements from past to present, where each cultural strain while maintaining its exclusiveness, has co-existed with others. A folk idea is a view that has a universal, commonly understood meaning meticulous to a socio-cultural alliance, other than which has not been officially, properly cleared. Folk culture and folk literature include broad vicinity counting within its margin, as traditional songs, tales, stories, narratives, faiths, and beliefs.

2. OBJECTIVES:

1. To understand the concept and impact of Assamese Folk Culture and Literature.
2. To focus on the different Assamese folk cultures and their literature as an important tool for cultural identity.

3. METHODOLOGY: The paper is based on analytical and descriptive methods. The secondary sources have been collected from different books, journals, edited volumes, periodicals, research papers, research articles, paper clips, newspapers, the internet, etc.



4. DISCUSSION: Folk or folkways are custom principles of everyday life and are the traditional ways that people act similar to drinking, eating, individual cleanliness, dressing, etc. Folkways are events and traditions that have modest ethical implications. Culture is a trait of societies not of individuals, and is the route of social life. Folk culture is learned; communally transmitted legacy of artifacts, understanding, attitudes, principles, and normative prospects. Folk culture provides an individual in society with the right and suitable ways to eat, dress, words, and verbal communication to exercise.

Folk literature is the literature that is broadcasted verbally. Folk literature is one of the mainly significant conventional widest sectors under the colourful fabric of a nation. In the 19th century, folklore came out as a novel meadow when antiquaries in England as well as philologists in Germany started to take an innovative concept on traditional literature. In 1812, the German brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm started publishing powerful quantities of folk narratives and understanding of Germanic myths. In the 19th century the word 'Folk' highlighted an illiterate man in an educated society. Folk literature or oral literature covers all the customary spoken or orally broadcasted shapes of traditional words. Folk literature includes extensive vicinity counting within its periphery as traditional songs, music, stories, tales, narratives, faiths, and beliefs.

Oral literature forms a major source of our knowledge about any society. It not only helps us to understand society but also is an important source in reconstructing the history of any period or of any place. Assam is a land of multi-ethnic cultures. The various ethnic groups display a vast array of oral literature that reveals the various aspects of Assamese life such as the socio-economic and political condition of the people of Assam. Assam's oral literature can be broadly categorized into five categories. From the cultural point of view, folk culture can be classified into different categories and this classification is known as ethnic genre or ethnic classification. This classification can also be called native classification since both ethnic and native classification refers to the same aspect of folk culture. The classification made considering the academic side as well as international norms of classification of oral literature is known as analytical classification. Within this category fall the following aspects. Folk poems or oral songs or verbal Songs/poems, Prose Narratives, Proverbs, sayings, maxims, Riddles, Folk speech, etc. from the point of view of various themes of folk literature, can be further subdivided into the following sub-categories: Love songs /love poems, Spiritual songs, Philosophical, Satirical, Comedy, Socio-economic, Encouraging, and Historical-political, etc. Many of the folk songs are sung during special occasions or festivals. Considering the context of its performance, folk literature can also be divided into categories. This is called contextual classification. Many of the aspects of art and Folk literature pertain to some social functions. For this reason, it is also called functional folklore. For example, a lullaby sung for making children sleep can be classified as a lullaby considering its functional aspects.

Depending on the regional and linguistic characteristics, Assamese oral literature can be divided into many categories such as Kamrupi (songs of Kamrup), Songs of Nalbari, Darangi (songs of Darrang), Sonitpuri (songs of Sonitpur), Lakhimpuri (Songs of Lakhimpur), Dibrugarh (Songs of Dibrugarh), Songs of Sivsagar, Songs of Jorhat, Songs of Nagaon, Songs of Marigaon, Goalparia (Songs of Goalpara), Songs of Dhuburi etc. Assamese oral literature can also be divided into many other categories depending on its contents. Among them, the religious songs are worth mentioning as they have occupied an important place in the oral or folk literature. Songs sung during or at the time of prayer or worship are called religious songs. These songs mainly contain the origin of gods and goddesses, the spread of their worship on the Earth, rituals of prayer and worship, etc.

Apeswari or Apechari Naam: These songs are sung, mainly by the women, to satisfy the fairies so that they do not harm the people, mostly the children.

Sonarai Pujra Geet: These songs are mainly sung in the Goalpara areas of Assam. These songs are sung by the cattle rearer at the time of Sonarai Puja and are known as Sonarai Pujar Geet. Kati Pujar Geet: These songs are sung by the women not having a child to satisfy God Kartik so that they can have a child. These songs are also sung in the Goalpara area.

Bas Pujar Geet: There are two kinds of Bas Puja- (i) Mada-kaam and (ii) Bahgawati Baas. Songs sung during this puja are called Baas pujar geet.

Tukuriya Pujar Geet: These songs are sung by the people of Pati Rabhas at the time of the Tukriya Puja.

Deh Bisarrar Geet: These songs are sung by the bhaktas or the monks who used to travel from one place to another singing song related to human life and daily happenings. These songs reflect the pains and joys of human lives.

Jikir: These songs are mainly sung by the Muslim people of Assam. Like the Deh Bisarrar geet these songs also represent human life, its joy, pain, etc.

Jaree Geet: These songs are also sung mainly by the Muslims giving a description of the tragedy of the Karabala. Besides the lives of Hazarat Mohammad, Bibi Fatema, Hasan-Hussain, etc. are also represented in these songs.

Kamrupi Loka Geet: These songs were mainly sung in the Kamarup areas. The bhakti or the spiritual feelings of these songs attract the people. Lord Krishna, Siv-Parvati, etc. are the main deities who are prayed through these songs. Songs



related to festivities Assam is a land of rich cultural heritage. Many festivals are celebrated throughout the State. Among the festivals, the most prominent ones are the Bihu, Bhatheli, Moho-Ho, Ambubachi, Suweri etc. In all these festivals many songs are sung and these are a major source of oral literature of Assam. However, these types of songs can broadly be divided into two categories - Songs related to Bohag Bihu and Reformative songs or songs related to various stages of life. Songs related to Bohag Bihu. The Bihu songs are mainly sung during the time of Bohag or Rongali Bihu. However, there are a few songs related to both Kati and Magh Bihu. The Bihu songs are known as Bihu Geet or Husari Geet. Perhaps Bihu Songs or the Bihu Naam also referred to as Bihu Geet are the most popular specimen of oral literature in Assam regardless of caste, creed, and religion. The time of the origin of the Bihu Songs cannot be said with confirmation. These songs are mainly sung during the time of the Bihu festivals of Assam and are transmitted orally from one generation to another. Many of these songs have been documented by many researchers. But there are still many bihu songs that are prevalent among the people of Assam in their oral form. These songs are rich with contents that deal with nature and various aspects of Assamese society. Besides Assam's traditions, festivals, art and architecture, ornaments, cosmetics, foods, wine, etc are several numerous topics that are reflected in the Bihu songs. In addition to the Bihu songs there are numerous other songs which are sung in many festivals celebrated by the various communities of Assam. Reformative songs or Songs related to various stages of life. These songs are mainly related to various stages of human life like Annaprasan, Sulakaran, Upanayan, Tolani Biya, biya naam, etc. Among these biya naam are most common during marriages. These kinds of songs reflect various aspects of the society. Mainly, the economic and social conditions are reflected well in many of the biya naam. In these songs, on many occasions Krishna-Rukmini or Hara-Gauri are represented as the main characters but the descriptions are related to reality.

Love songs /love poems: Generally songs related to love; affection, etc. are categorized as love songs. These folk love songs are sung during various festivals and situations. Many of the Bihu songs or Bihu naam fall in this category. These songs contain numerous elements of love. Besides the Bihu songs, love songs, are further subdivided into some categories like Bhabaiya- Chatka, Musali or Mahut Geet, lewatan, Garakhiya Geet, etc.

Children's Song: Songs related to children are found in all parts of the world. In the Assamese language, these songs include lullabies, nursery poems, and children's game songs. Lullabies: These songs are sung by parents, grandfather or grandmother, and other senior members to make the children sleep. The language of these songs is very simple and easy to understand by the children. Nursery rhymes: To mollify the offended children or to feed them parents or other family members sing these songs known as Nisukani Geet in Assamese.

Work Songs: Songs related to various activities or work can be termed work songs. Since most folk people are always somehow related to various activities, there are many songs that they sing during their work as a means of relaxation. Songs of the plowman or haluoi geet, songs sung during the time of producing gur or Kuhiar Pera Geet, Songs sung during the time of riding boat or Nao baote Goa Geet, songs during the time of fishing, of catching an elephant in the jungle, etc. are some notable examples of work song.

Songs related to Independence: The Indian freedom struggle touched the people of every caste community and religion, from the elite to the common people in India. Many songs were composed in Assamese songs to spread the message of freedom struggle. In many of these songs the hanging of Kushal Konwar, Maniram Dewan was a recurrent theme.

Ballads: Ballads are songs that describe various stories connected with myths, legends, history, magic etc. Assamese ballads include several topics like myths of the birth of Dheki, Dhol, sugarcane, etc., historical figures like Gandhi, peasant struggles of Rangia, Patharughat, Phulaguri, etc., and legends like Beula Lakhindar, etc. Oral literature also includes charms or mantras. The charms are considered a major source of oral literature of Assam. Charms, however, can be divided into such categories as magical charms, prayer charms, threatening charms, etc.

Prose Narratives: Like folk songs, prose narratives are also a major source of oral literature. It includes myths, legends, and tales. Just as the songs are related to myths, the prose narratives also deal with myths that are related to the origin of animals and birds, geographical features, miracles, activities of gods and goddesses, etc. Tales are also a very important source of oral literature. Tales can be divided into animal tales, supernatural tales, Etiological tales, Jokes, anecdotes, etc. Tales of foxes, crows, monkeys, etc., are very common in Assam. Some of the interesting tales of Assam have already been collected by several scholars and they are published in the form of books. Collections of tales by Laxminath Bezbarua, Prafulla Dutta Goswami are some examples.

Proverbs and Riddles: This is also an important form of oral literature in Assam as in many other parts of the world. Most of the proverbs are related to a story or tale which gives a moral. Assamese Dakar bachan is an important example of such a proverb. Riddles or Fakora Jojana are intended to provide wisdom and questions. Thus, it is seen that Assamese oral literature consists of songs and tales. All the tribes of Assam have their own folk tales and folk songs which give a picture of the society of certain periods. Oral sources provided a valuable key to the study of the ethnic or tribal groups in Assam.



Folk Customs are reflected in folk literature and material culture. It is the bridge between oral literature and material culture. Traditions and customs related to agriculture, birth, marriage, death, etc. can be included in the folk customs. Folk customs mainly include four different aspects Folk Festivals, Folk games, Folk medicine, Folk religion, etc. The principal folk festival of Assam as known to all is Bihu. However, every tribe of Assam celebrates their own tribal festivals most of which are mainly related to agriculture. Besides Bihu, Boishagu, and Kehrai puja by the Bodo, Ali-Ai-Ligang by the Missings, Me-Dum-Me-Phi by the Ahoms are celebrated on a large scale. Holi, Durga Puja, Laxmi Puja, Eld, Muharram etc., are also celebrated by the people of Assam. Assamese people also enjoy a wide range of folk games like Koni Juj or egg tapping, Kori Khel, Moh Juj or Buffalo fight, Bulbuli Soraair Juj or Nightingale fight, kukura juj or Cock Fight, Nao kehl or Boat Race, etc. Most of these games are played during festival time. The custom of folk medicine of Assam like other customs is very rich. People used to believe in folk medicine as their cure for various diseases. Medicinal plants found in Assam's forests are widely used for treating diseases. Customs related to folk religion are mainly displayed in the time of practicing or following religious rituals. Customs related to birth, marriage, and deaths are mainly related to the religious beliefs of the people which vary among the different groups of people or tribes. The beginning of ethical education or any doctrines existed as a very normal growth. Folk culture and literature have been highlighting lessons to the common people in varied facets of life. For the most part, folk culture and literature of North East India and Assam are the rich resources for the women folk. Folk culture and literature are similar to Air Naam, Biya Naam, Bihu Naam, Dakar Bachan, etc. It is akin to proverbs. In Assamese culture and literature, there are different kinds of folk-based literature and language.

Bia Naam (Marriage Song) is the identity of Assamese folk culture and literature and also the identity of women folk. The Assamese marriage songs are of huge enlightening value. The folk culture highlights the day-to-day existence, the happiness and sadness of the general people. The Bihu-Naam is a high-quality foundation to highlight the identity of Assamese women folk. Folk culture and literature glorify edification about feeling affection for, the natural world, society, custom, practice, patriotism, devotion, human relation, human identity etc. The Bihu-Song is a paradigm of love and devotion. This Bihu-Song highlight the weaving tradition of Assamese women glorifies the love of a girl to her identity and has a communication of patriotism too. Hence, we have to talk about Assamese Gamusa the flowered towel. Here a girl can focus her talent and it is the identity of Assamese woman folk. There are high-quality facts of 'proverbs' in Assamese culture and literature and are the impulsive manifestation of the learned folk-mind. Proverbs communicate edification on various questions, connected to women. The varied folk culture and its literature have woven man, the natural world, and animal and plant creation and demonstrate the vast journey of the mind's eye and singular development of intelligence. The Assamese society has its elite background, traditions, and traditions. It favors going after old customs, rituals, and practices. Assamese literature has some proverbs that instruct us to be grateful for a good daughter and a good mother-in-law. Assamese people have the idea and view that if a daughter is excellent or superior, as a result, moreover is the son-in-law. But a mother-in-law is fine, thus, is the daughter-in-law.

5. FINDINGS: The findings of the paper are that folk literature and culture are the identity of each race, caste, and community. The influence of folk literature is a part of literature. Folk culture and folk literature are the identity of the entire Assamese culture. In each level folk culture is a topic of study. The varied ancient Assamese folk literature and culture have played a significant task in customary Assamese society. India has a heritage of wealthy and mixed folk literature. Folk literature is the identity from generation to generation. Assam has an affluent and prosperous documentation of folk literature.

6. CONCLUSIONS: The research paper highlighted the influence and impact of folk literature which is a part of literature and has its imperative constituent. The researchers, folklorists, and sociologists must provide a high-quality connection regarding the ethnicity, traditions, values, and viewpoints of the people and to transformations therein all the way through the ages. Folk literature continues as a spontaneous recitation that obtains bright forms and it generates stunning and amazing humankind of dreams from side to side its own ability of narration. Really speaking, folk literature absorbs a solution to Assamese identity. It is wealthy sufficient and throws glow on the varied components of Assamese societal life and its prosperous way of life.

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